

INFORMATION**EXTERNAL RELATIONS****THE EEC GENERALISED PREFERENCES****65/74**C O N T E N T S

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1. The early history :

As early as 1958 a GATT report suggested that developed countries should give up protecting their industries against imports of manufactured goods from developing countries.

In May 1963, in a GATT ministerial meeting, the EEC ministers, and those of the countries associated with the Community, suggested that a suitable way of promoting the trade and development of the countries in an early stage of growth would be to give preferential treatment to their exports of manufactured goods and semi-manufactures.

The fact that GATT was reticent about this helped towards the formation of UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), which was at that time in the process of gestation.

In 1964, at the first UNCTAD session, the idea put forward by the EEC and its Associates made further headway.

In 1968, at the second UNCTAD conference in New Delhi, agreement was reached on setting up a system of generalised preferences; and in October 1970, an agreement was reached in UNCTAD for bringing this system into being.

Since July 1, 1971 the EEC has been operating a system of customs franchise known as "generalised preferences", in favour of manufactured and semi-finished goods coming from developing countries. Basic agricultural produce, basic industrial products and industrial raw materials are not included in this preference system.

The preferences are not : reciprocal - the countries which enjoy them are not required to make equivalent reductions in their customs duties ;
discriminatory - the preferences are given to all developing countries.

The preferences are : generalised - the preferences are granted in principle by all developed countries.

The preferences are not negotiated. They are the subject of an autonomous offer resulting from discussion with the countries which are to enjoy them.

2. How the system works

The Community system is based on preferential imports free of customs duty up to specified ceilings. The latter are calculated by reference to a fixed basic amount corresponding to the c.i.f. value of imports from the beneficiary countries in a specified reference year, plus 5 % of the c.i.f. value of imports from other countries (additional amount). The ceiling is thus raised each year, the additional amount being the indicator of the acceleration of trade between the Community and its industrial partners.

- For sensitive products there is a system of tariff quotas.
- The "buffer", or maximum amounts, are fixed by the beneficiary countries. Their effect is to limit to a given proportion of the ceilings and quotas the maximum amount which may be used by any individual country

In the dynamic of the operation the buffer mechanism cannot fail to secure additional opportunities for the less advanced and less competitive countries, and it will be up to them to take advantage of these.

- The exporting countries are required to supply certificates of origin, so that traffic diversions can be avoided.

3. The Community offers 1971 - 1972 - 1973 :

In 1971, the system could only operate for 6 months.

The number of processed agricultural products covered by the Community scheme was 147. It remained the same through 1971-73. The system provides a selective safeguard clause which has never been used.

The impact in terms of products covered during the first 6 months of 1971 was U.A. 45 million (1) of imports into the Six from beneficiary countries which are not associated with the Community.

(1) U.A. = Unit of Account = c. BF. 50 = US \$ 1 before the Smithsonian devaluation of 1972.

Manufactures and semi-manufactures :

The ceilings and quotas opened amounted to :

U.A. 340 million in 1971
U.A. 780 million in 1972
U.A. 900 million in 1973

In 1971 the year 1968 was the reference year chosen for all calculations.

- The ceilings opened for 1972 showed an overall increase of 15 %. This resulted from the choice of 1969 as the reference year for calculation of the additional amount (5 % of the imports from countries not included in arriving at the basic amount). The year 1968 remained the reference year for determining the basic amount.

For 1973, the year of reference for the additional amount was 1970, but the basic amount was still calculated from 1968 figures. The increase has been estimated at about 15 %.

- The number of products subject to tariff quota was :

53 in the first half of 1971
58 in 1972
60 in 1973

- In 1971, the buffers limiting the preferential imports from individual developing countries for specific products, were in general not higher than 50 % of the ceiling fixed for the product in question.

In 1972 and 1973, a number of the buffers were lowered from 50 % to 30 %, or from 30 % to 20 %. This was for the purpose of dealing with special situations (especially in Yugoslavia, Hong Kong, South Korea and Brazil) and was aimed to safeguard the advantages accruing to the less competitive beneficiaries.

For textiles :

The tariff quotas and ceilings opened amounted to :

19,429 tonnes for the second half of 1971
39,444 tonnes in 1972
and 42,631 tonnes in 1973

In 1972, the beneficiary countries fell far short of using all the opportunities offered by the Community scheme. The number of independent beneficiary countries rose from 91 in 1971-72 to 102 in 1973.

In December 1973, the Council agreed to the principle of introducing a reserve proportion into the Community quotas, making it possible for available quotas not used by specific countries to be transferred into the reserve and made available for use by other countries.

4. Three essential features in the 1974 scheme

The first feature of the 1974 scheme is that it is applied by the enlarged Community. By protocol 23 annexed to the Act of Adhesion, the three member countries had been "authorised to postpone until January 1, 1974 the application of the Community system of generalised tariff preferences".

Secondly, in virtue of the Summit directives given in Paris (October 1972) in which the heads of State or government expressed their desire to promote a policy of development cooperation on the world scale, the Community improved its offer of generalised preferences.

Thirdly, the arrangements made by the Commission for 1974 link the application of the system of preferences with the giving of effect to the common declaration of intent adopted after the negotiations with Great Britain and annexed to the Act of Adhesion.

It is the intention of the Community to strengthen its trade relations with Commonwealth countries in Asia, taking into account the interests of other countries in the same region. The alignment upon the external tariff of the Community, as from January 1, 1974 of the customs tariffs of the new member countries, and more especially that of Great Britain, implies a raising of the rates of duty charged under the imperial preference scheme.

In regard to processed agricultural products the 1974 scheme adopted by the Council of Ministers on December 18, 1973 increases the previous preference margins and includes a number of additional products making 187 in all.

The most important of these are fish flour, certain varieties of shrimp, coconut oil for industrial use, dehydrated coconut, coconut butter, soluble coffee, certain forms of preserved pineapple and, as a temporary and exceptional measure, tobacco leaf of the Virginia flue-cured type. The trade impact of the products covered is estimated at U.A. 450 million.

In regard to cocoa butter, soluble coffee and preserved pineapple, the Community has for the first time introduced a tariff quota into the agricultural sector of its generalised preferences scheme. Hitherto there had been no ceilings for the advantages given in respect of agricultural produce which were, however, subject to a safeguard clause.

Moreover the tariff quota opened for tobacco of the Virginia flue-cured type is the first practical application of the common declaration of intent; and it is the first time the Community has brought a basic product within the scope of its generalised preferences scheme.

For all industrial products other than textiles, the year 1971 was chosen as reference year for calculating both the basic amount and the additional amount.

- This has materially increased the ceilings, the total amount of which is higher to some U.A. 2,000 million. This is equivalent to a 40 % rise over the figures which would have resulted in 1973 by the Nine applying the system as applied in the same year by the Six.
 - The number of sensitive products subject to quota is reduced to 51.
 - In regard to the buffers, there are practically no restrictions compared with 1972 and 1973.
 - Manufactures of jute and coco are given the benefit of a 40 % tariff cut.
 - The 1974 scheme envisaged a suitable procedure to secure fuller utilisation by beneficiary countries of the preferential advantages made available to them.
 - For textile goods covered by chapters 50 to 63 of the Common Customs tariff, the quotas and ceilings have been calculated to provide a 50 % increase compared with those in force in 1973 for the Community of Six. The import potential is thus 68,205 tonnes, or about U.A. 500 million.
5. June 19, 1974 -- the Commission draws up its proposals to the Council for the 1975 scheme

Despite the threat of recession, the Community wishes to maintain its system of generalised preferences and push it still further.

It has gone out of its way to acknowledge its special responsibility to developing countries, who stand to be the biggest losers from the world crisis.

The Community wishes to secure a balanced development between the system of generalised preferences and the policy of association. The latter comprises the Association agreements, including the current negotiations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and those connected with a unified approach to the mediterranean countries.

The common Declaration of Intent amounts to a permanent commitment in regard to Commonwealth countries in Asia. Some of these countries, especially India, are very seriously affected by the current crisis. A first stage in the implementation of this Declaration was accomplished as from January 1, 1974, largely by the operation of the S.G.P. (1)

The Commission intends to continue the improvement thus begun.

In the Community's general plans for the forthcoming multilateral negotiations in GATT, it pays particular attention to the case of developing countries which may be concerned about the "erosion" of the preferences they have enjoyed, by the granting of further tariff reductions.

It is the intention of the Community to continue improving its own system of preferences, the independent character of which has been emphasised in the foregoing.

The 1975 plan includes a number of improvements and readjustments, as well as simple renewals and additional measures.

Improvements :

For processed agricultural products covered by chapters 1 to 24 of the Common Customs tariff, the 20 % margins of preference are increased to 40 % for a number of products.

The 40 % margins of preference are raised to 50 % and S.G.P. duties lower than 5 % are eliminated. The volume of trade covered is stated to have been increased to U.A. 650 million.

For industrial manufactures and semi-manufactures, the improvements proposed by

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(1) System of generalised preferences

the Commission are primarily concerned with :

- raising the ceilings through the change in calculation procedure.

The basic amount remains unchanged, using the 1971 figures as the year of reference. The additional amount will be calculated from the 1972 figures.

The total increase in ceilings and quotas opened in 1975 is around 15 %.

The volume of trade covered will be U.A. 2,300 million.

- the number of sensitive products subject to tariff quotas is reduced to 7.

The Commission intends to apply the lessons learnt from the S.G.P experience since 1971. Beneficiary countries have complained of the complexity of the quotas, and the rigid system of managing them. In the past none of the tariff quotas opened has been fully utilised.

- introduction of the reserve proportion into the tariff quotas. This is a method of helping beneficiary countries to make the best use of the advantages provided for them. Because of technical difficulties this system was not introduced in 1974.

The administration of the tariff quotas under the generalised preferences scheme is based on a definite allocation of specific shares to the member countries. This has raised the question of importers' equality of access to the Community market.

The Commission takes the view that in current circumstances a reserve proportion of 10 % of the amount of the quota is a minimum.

- Manufactures of jute and coco are given a tariff reduction of 60 %.
- Except for one product, the buffers may be raised to 50 % in respect of 44 products transferred from the present system of tariff quotas to the system of supervised ceilings.

The buffers for other products are to be kept at the 1974 percentage levels.

Readjustments :

When it is established that any beneficiary has reached the buffers in 1972 and in 1973, or supplied at least 40 % of the imports into the Community from all beneficiary countries, a buffer of 15 % will be applied to the beneficiary in question.

It will still be able to have the benefit of the amount of the 1974 buffer until the amount of the 15 % stop exceeds it through the normal effect of progressive raising of the ceilings in subsequent preference-years.

Continuations :

The multifibre agreement was signed in Geneva on March 25, 1974, but the bilateral negotiations under it are not yet completed. The Commission is not at present in a position to submit to Council suitable proposals for textiles under the S.G.P. If these negotiations should not have been completed within the next few months, a transitional solution for 1975 will have to be considered. The present S.G.P. system for the textiles sector as a whole would then be continued into 1975, with a uniform flat-rate increase of 5 % in the ceilings and tariff quotas.

Additional measures

In regard to the rules of origin, a special effort has been made to help countries which are members of economic groups. The broadening of the rules tends to help regional integration; and the Commission has accordingly proposed to Council the use of a cumulative system of the EFTA type for exports to the Community from (for example) Anase (1) or from the Andine Group (2).

- A programme of seminars will be organised as part of an active continuation of the policy of providing information for government authorities and those commercially concerned.

- (1) Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore
(2) Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

- A system for collection of statistical data will shortly be in operation. The aim is to assess the effect of the preferences on economic activity in the Community and to measure the impact on the trade between the Community and the beneficiary countries.
- It has been decided to improve the statistical information regarding the preferential imports, so that the advantages made available can be better administered and better adjusted. Another measure contemplated is the formation of a documentation agency for analysis and advisory work on the generalised preferences.

6. East European countries :

Rumania : On June 4, 1973 the Council of the European Communities decided in principle that Rumania be included among the countries having the benefit of Community generalised preferences as from January 1, 1974. There was a rider to the effect that adequate arrangements would have to be made to take into account the special case of this country. The measure coincided with a first stage in improving the system of generalised preferences.

The decision was based on criteria taking account of the development level and economic structure of Rumania in the light of similar criteria applied to the economies of other countries which have the benefit of S.G.P.

Textiles, footwear, products covered by the ECSC Treaty and goods subject to tariff quotas are excluded from the S.G.P. concession.

The plan regarding Rumania in 1975 envisages the possibility that these exceptions may be reconsidered in the light of the economic facts.

Any inconveniences which might be occasioned to the initial beneficiary countries through the inclusion of Rumania in the S.G.P. scheme are mitigated by the fact that the preferential ceilings laid down for the whole of the beneficiary group will be increased by the volume of rumanian trade with the EEC and by the inclusion in this system of maximum amounts per beneficiary country.

Bulgaria : In September 1973, on the occasion of the visit to Bulgaria of the French Minister, Mr. Messmer, the Bulgarian authorities emphasised that they had put in a request through the UNCTAD machinery to the effect that Bulgaria should be included among the countries benefiting from Community preferences.

The French representative informed Council of this wish in October 1973.

In the opinion of the Commission, consideration of the Bulgarian request requires an initial official request by Bulgaria to the Community.

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7. Conclusions

The generalised preferences are a turning point in international trade relations. At present there are 104 countries which have the benefit of them.

The industrial countries, including the Community and its members, have for the first time taken concerted action with the less advanced countries in the form of practical measures to assist development.

The Community policy relating to generalised preferences is based on a progressive attitude and a pragmatic approach.

- The advantages received by the beneficiary countries are being consistently improved and extended.
- At the same time a balance has to be kept between the need for promoting exports of manufactured goods and processed agricultural products from developing countries, and the protection of sensitive industries and products in the Community.

The capacity of the Community of Nine for imports from developing countries is about U.A. 25,000 million annually.

Up to 1974 the burden of the action for developing countries was borne principally by the Community.

Recently the canadian government made the necessary arrangements for bringing into effect a system of generalised preferences as from July 1,1974.

The plan proposed by the United States is contained in the 1973 Trade Reform Bill,which is currently passing through the different stages of the legislative process.

Most of the countries granting these preferences improved their system in 1974. At the last meeting of the UNCTAD special Committee on preferences, they stated their intention of continuing their action to the same effect.

The generalised preferences are a main component of the development co-operation policy.

The policy of generalised preferences is in line with one of the ultimate objectives of the European Economic Community. This is the desire to seek a more balanced distribution of the world's wealth.